RURAL ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE NEGRO IN NORTH CAROLINA, 1875-1900

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CHANDLER, MARTIN BELL, JR. Rural Attitudes Toward the Negro in North Carolina, 1875-1900. (1969) Directed by: Dr. Richard Bardolph. pp. 92

The "Redemption" years, 1876-1894, formed a buffer between the countervailing periods of Revolutionary Reconstruction and Reactionary White Supremacy. The years following the reestablishment of Home Rule were characterized by conservatism rather than innovation. Social inequality predominated and was perpetuated by the poor whites who felt their social and economic status threatened. There was no assimilation or equalization of rights. The relative calm of the period can be attributed to the acceptance of the status quo by the majority of both blacks and whites.

The status quo derived much of its definition and strength in the rural community from the tenant lease system which defined social and economic roles. Although it was allegedly not a racial institution, Negroes were the principal victims of its injustices. Refugees who fled to the city found little respite, for they were confined to service occupations and menial labor. The social and economic inequalities to which they were subjected were as severe as those that marked the rural sections of the state.

The Negro found that the courts perpetuated rather than alleviated the discrimination he suffered. Because blacks who were found guilty of felonies were deprived of the franchise, the white-dominated judiciary had a strong incentive to secure Negro convictions. Black prisoners were

prized as a source of supplying the state with income and labor through the convict-lease system.

The Negro sought to overcome the inequalities he suffered through education. He received some encouragement in this pursuit up to 1880; thereafter inequalities inherent in the dual school system grew progressively worse. The greatest Negro advances were made in the training of teachers. The school and the church were the two principal institutions responsible for the social, economic, and intellectual advance of the Negro in this period.

The Negro was allowed to make small advances as long as the Democrats were in power. But when they were unseated in 1894, the white majority felt its superiority threatened and an anti-Negro reaction set in. Thereafter, Negro progress came to a standstill, not to be significantly resumed for another seventy years.

RURAL ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE NEGRO IN NORTH CAROLINA, 1875-1900

by

Martin Bell Chandler, Jr.

A Thesis Submitted to
the Faculty of the Graduate School at
The University of North Carolina at Greensboro
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts in History

Greensboro
April, 1969

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Date of Examination

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The writer wishes to express his great appreciation to Dr. Richard Bardolph, both for his guidance in this study, and for making it possible, and to his wife, Kay, for her constant encouragement.

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PREFACE

This paper deals with white attitudes toward the Negro in North Carolina during the "Redemption" period, the years following Reconstruction and preceding the flood of Jim Crow Legislation. More specifically, it is an evaluation of the mentality of the rural community in relation to the Negro during the period. Finally, it makes an attempt to trace the evolution of irrational white attitudes that were manifested in the white supremacy campaigns of the 1890's.

In instances where specific evidence on North Carolina was insufficient, I have drawn upon data of surrounding states on the assumption that conditions in the Southeast were more or less uniform.[1] By employing this methodology, I have also been able to better relate the similarities and differences that existed in racial attitudes between North Carolina and its neighbors.

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[1]It may perhaps be added here that where data are available in particular matters, for both North Carolina and her neighbors, the evidence strongly confirms this assumption.

CHAPTER I

SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS

Emancipation and the end of the Civil War in countless instances resulted in the abrogation of the responsibilities that had been imposed by the old regime. The former master no longer felt obligated to support his unproductive and excess laborers, and so disowned them. The freedman, for his part, was often anxious to migrate in search of equality and opportunity and so abandoned his former owner. The Reconstruction government, with its alleged injustices, furthered this new separatism by increasing black consciousness and white racial antipathy. Fortunately, Reconstruction was brief, lasting only two years, and then North Carolinians were left to shape their own destiny.

Left to her own devices, North Carolina did surprisingly well in the matter of race relations during the next quarter century compared with other southern states. Indeed, when the prominent Negro and ex-governor of Louisiana, P.B.S. Pinchback, visited the state in 1892, he expressed surprise at the cordial relations existing between the races and remarked that he did not believe such a state of

affairs existed anywhere else in the South.[1] What the social relationships were in this era and how they evolved constitutes the substance of the following pages.

Reconstruction increased racial prejudice and convinced the southern white that it was against his best interests to vest the Negro with political power. His condemnation of the Negro was somewhat mitigated by the realization that in many instances his former slave was simply the dupe of carpetbaggers and scalawags. Furthermore, the institution of slavery had left a residue of affection between master and slave that endured for many years. In fact, northern visitors to the South during this period often commented on the familiar contact between the races. They expressed consternation and disgust at having viewed such intimacies as white babies being suckled at black breasts and at seeing white and colored children playing together. Nor could they understand the friendship that existed between maid and mistress, employer and employee, customer and clerk.[2] Still, the relationships

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[1]William Jacob Walls, Joseph Charles Price, Educator and Race Leader (Boston: The Christopher Publishing House, 1943), pp. 388-389. Actually Pinchback served only as acting Governor for a month. His actual status was that of lieutenant-governor.

[2]C. Vann Woodward, The Strange Career of Jim Crow (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), pp. 42-43.

which existed were not, in every instance, as closely knit as may have been assumed from outward appearance. For while freedom had in one sense decreased the distance between blacks and whites, it also contributed toward increasing the gulf. For example, formerly the domestic servant had been taken into the confidence of his master and had been the caretaker of the family secrets. With the advent of freedom, however, the freedman established his own household, family ties and loyalties, and lived apart. Thus, with the increase of physical distance, the deterioration of this former relationship was inevitable![3]

The attitude of the white man towards the Negro often depended on the latter's background. The freedman was regarded with more affection than was the freeman because of the ties that had formerly existed.[4] The Negro who had a background of slavery and who knew how to act obsequiously in the presence of the "better" class of whites was held in high regard and was affectionately called "Uncle" or "Aunt." Of course, as the period under study progressed, there were more and more Negroes born out

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[3]Albion W. Tourgee, An Appeal to Caesor (New York: Fords, Howard, and Hulbert, 1884), p. 103.

[4]A freeman, as the term is here used, was a Negro that was free before Emancipation; a freedman was a Negro who was a slave before Emancipation.

of slavery and they had little claim on the affection of the upper class of whites. The descendants of slaves were more self-assertive and lacked the deference of their elders.[5] By 1892, the race situation deteriorated to such an extent that one contemporary observed:

> There are graceful amenities between old slaves and former owners, but the races distrust and dislike each other. I have heard an ardent North Carolina Republican say before a black servant: "When I see a nigger driving a mule, I always wonder why the mule, as the superior animal, does not drive the nigger. . . ." The white man has little confidence in the character of his black neighbor, and the negro little regard for the opinion of his white neighbor. Nowhere is this absolute distrust so manifest as in politics.[6]

The distrust and dislike of the free Negro or "Ol' Issy," as he was called, began when slavery was still in existence.[7] The slave owner thought that the proximity of the free Negro to his slaves had a deleterious effect. He feared that the free Negro would imbue his field hands with envy, poor work habits and rebellious attitudes. The slave also had reason

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[5]Rosser Howard Taylor, Carolina Crossroads: A Study of Rural Life at the End of the Horse-and-Buggy Era (Murfreesboro, N. C.: Johnson Publishing Company, 1966), pp. 127-128.

[6]Albert Bushnell Hart, "A Cross-Section Through North Carolina," The Nation, March 17, 1892, p. 208.

[7]The terms "Ol Issy" and "New Issy" were invented by the freedman to differentiate between the free and freed Negro. The idea for these terms came from two issues of confederate money--the New Issue was supposed to be of a superior value.

to dislike the free Negro. He envied him his freedom and resented his vaunted superiority. There was, moreover, a much higher percentage of mulattoes among the free Negroes than among the slaves. The free Negroes were further looked down upon because of their resemblance to, and association with, the poor whites. This antipathy on the part of the slaves and slave owners toward the free Negro continued after emancipation and was still prevalent in the Redemption period.[8] One reason for the persistence of this prejudice was that the ex-slaves had better work habits than did "Ol' Issy" and for that reason their labor was more highly valued. Another reason is that at first there was little intermarriage between the free and freed Negro because the freedman lost caste if he married a free Negro.[9]

During the Redemption period there was also conflict between the full-blooded Negroes and the mulattoes, because the white southerners' preference for mulattoes as servants caused envy among the darker-skinned Negroes. As one observer put it, the mulatto rejoiced "in the possession of a very liberal allowance of pure white blood and used

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[8]The Redemption Period refers to the years following the reestablishment of home rule and preceding the flood of Jim Crow legislation. In North Carolina this period began in 1876 and ended in 1894.

[9]David Dodge, "The Free Negro in North Carolina," Atlantic Monthly, LVII (Jan. 1886), 29-30.

every means in his power to gain recognition by his white brethren."[10] Negro leaders often warned the blacks that their light-colored brothers were trying to monopolize the best positions. The whites were also fond of attributing the good instincts of a mulatto to his white blood and any misconduct to his Negro blood. As one contemporary remarked,

> sometimes the riotous mix-blooded fellow--nine parts white--would revert to nature and leave town and get into the most disgraceful fracases over some yellow woman, flourishing his razor, cutting and slashing.[11]

If a mulatto happened to be unusually intelligent, this was also attributed to his Anglo-Saxon heredity. Finally, the white man had a preference for the mulatto over the full-blooded Negro in his sexual relationships and black men preferred them as wives in spite of their reputed infertility. Indeed, it was not uncommon for a black man to boast about his wife's light skin.[12]

Race consciousness was heightened during Reconstruction. Not a few blacks and mulattoes showed an increasing disposition to bury their conflict formally, if not actually, and Negroes of whatever pigmentation began to

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[10] John Patterson Green, Recollections of the Inhabitants, Localities, Superstitions and Ku Klux Outrages in the Carolinas (Cleveland, Ohio: privately printed, 1880), p. 186.

[11] Robert Watson Winston, It's a Far Cry (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1937), p. 245.

[12] Taylor, op. cit., p. 134.

discuss the need for racial solidarity. One of the most momentous manifestations of this tendency during this period was the voluntary withdrawal of Negroes from the white dominated Protestant churches, often over white protests, in order to establish and control their own separate religious institutions. Negroes furthermore began to demand their own schools and in some cases, even objected to the employment of white teachers in their schools![13]

Generally speaking the attitude of blacks towards the more exalted whites (who had no reason to be uneasy about their status) was one of deference and respect. One reason for this was that the white patrician often had a more liberal outlook toward the Negroes and generally deplored their mistreatment. On the other hand, the Negro had nothing but contempt for the lower class of whites. Consequently, it was at the lower levels of society that racial tensions were greatest. One Negro on a steamboat, for instance, was heard to remark: "guess dem gemmen nevah been steamboatin' befoh. Nevah seen white folks lay 'round de freight' dat way. Seen niggers do it though."[14] Negroes

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[13]Bertram Wilbur Doyle, The Etiquette of Race Relations in the South: A Study in Social Control (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1937), p. 135.

[14]Ibid., p. 138.

often had a standard of living similar to that of the poor whites and competed with them for the same jobs. Thus the old adage "familiarity breeds contempt" achieved the fullness of its potential in this situation. As one observer put it,

> The hatred of poorer whites for blacks was simply unbelievable. On one occasion when our town constable was shot in the arm by a negro, he was so much humiliated that he ground his teeth in the flesh and bit off the wounded parts and spat them out.[15]

Such racist frenzy was not as prevalent among the youth of the South. White and Negro boys were often companions, and their relationships on a neutral playground were friendly and uninhibited until they reached adolescence; but Negro boys, on occasion would attach themselves to white boys of upper class parents and bully the poor white boys until a fist fight decided the matter.[16]

The relationship which existed between whites and blacks was discernible in the manner of greeting. The well-to-do white man might greet the ex-slave in an affectionate manner by calling him "Uncle" or "Aunt" or "you old rascal." Such jovial greetings did not extend to the younger generation of Negroes. They had no claim on the affection of the whites and such familiarity was resented.

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[15]Winston, op. cit., p. 186.

[16]Taylor, op. cit., p. 129.

One appellation given to Negroes of all ages was "boy." Some names were restricted to Negroes in certain occupations, such as "George" for porters on Pullman cars. In terms of respectability the designation "nigger" was lowest on the social scale. The appellation "darky" was strongly disliked by the Negro and "colored people" was barely acceptable. The term "Negress," when applied to a Negro woman, was considered to be an insult. Sometimes in a situation where both races were present, "Niggra" might be used as a compromise between the terms "nigger" and "negro." When this expression was applied, it was usually because of the desire not to insult the black man. The poor white man often did not use the term Negro because he regarded it as pretentious. The name "niggra" often inspired the silent contempt of the black man. "Mister" or "Mistress" was rarely used by whites when referring to the black race. In one instance a southern white expressed relief when the title of "Doctor" was conferred on Booker T. Washington because it allowed him to avoid the embarrassing situation of referring to him as "Mister." The title of "Mrs." for a Negro woman was especially contrary to social custom. Also the term "lady" was rarely employed by whites in referring to Negro women, although Negroes often used that designation in referring to white women. One can conclude from a review of the terms designated for the females of the two races that they

reflected the high regard for the virtue of white woman and the disregard for that of the Negro woman. Some of the more common designations used by the Negro for the white race were "Mister," "Cap or Cap'n," "Boss," and to a lesser extent "Mr. or Miss Bill."[17]

When meeting women of the other race on the street, men of neither race tipped their hats. Negro men, however, usually removed their hats in the presence of white ladies and also when they entered a "white only" establishment. The only time a white man removed his hat in the presence of the Negro was when he entered the black man's church. When the two races came into contact with one another, the Negro usually spoke first. The only time the two races engaged in shaking hands was on a superior-inferior basis.[18]

Negroes usually did not make a point of striving for social equality with whites. One reason for this was, of course, white opposition. While the southern white might agree that the Lord was as interested in saving the black man's soul as that of a white, he insisted that equality did not extend to the Negro's physical being. God Himself--so ran the argument--had created these racial distinctions and it was not a violation of His trust to practice segregation

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[17]Doyle, op. cit., pp. 138-146.

[18]Taylor, loc. cit.

for the good of southern society.[19] As a consequence, during the Reconstruction period, there was an extension of segregation practices to churches and schools, military life and other public institutions. Still, while these separatistic usages were retained during the years 1875-1896, they were not expanded upon. Even in the area of politics where the Negro's presence was regarded as anathema, he had a surprising amount of representation.

Negroes, for the most part, were not aggressive in pressing for their rights even after the Civil Rights Acts of 1866 and 1875 had guaranteed their citizenship and their equal rights in public places. There are some notable exceptions however. A small minority did successfully test their rights in such public places as railroads, steamboats, hotels and theaters. In 1885, a Negro newspaperman from Boston, T. McCants Stewart, tested his rights in North Carolina without encountering any major obstacles. He complained that while on board a steamboat in North Carolina a Negro waiter seated him at a separate table, though in the same dining area with whites; but he noted that he was not discriminated against in dining arrangements in Wilmington, and concluded that his treatment in restaurants in North Carolina contrasted favorably with that which he had

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[19] J. W. Stagg, The Race Problem in the South (Charlotte, N.C.: Presbyterian Publishing Company, 1900), pp. 25-26.

received in the North. He was also impressed by the frequency with which white Carolinians engaged him in polite conversation. He even concluded that southern whites were less afraid to have contact with colored people than were the whites of the North.[20]

Many Negro leaders deplored any attempt on the part of the black man to gain social equality. Although they were often in favor of equality of opportunity, they tended toward separatism in matters affecting social intercourse. Plato Collins summarized the majority attitude of the races toward social equality in the South when he wrote:

> There never was and never will be social equality between races. The term itself had its origin in political warfare. All sensible people understand its meaning and pass it over in silence. The pride and instincts of both races forbid it. Nature has interposed a well-defined barrier. It is needless for me to assert that the white race will be forever opposed to it. The negro does not desire it, and if he did, as people cannot be associates without mutual consent, the question must remain settled.[21]

Many of the social mores of the Reconstruction and slave eras continued to prevail during the Redemption period. For example, if a white man ate at a Negro's table, he became the talk of the community, and he found it extremely difficult to live down such an extreme violation of the social

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[20]Woodward, op. cit., pp. 38-39.

[21]Plato Collins, "The Negro Must Remain in the South," North Carolina University Magazine, X No. 3,(1891), 151.

code. Of course, it was quite acceptable to have a Negro prepare the meal in the white man's home. When the Negro boarded with a white as a day laborer, he entered his house through the rear door and ate by himself in the kitchen. By custom, when he was permitted to discuss religion with the white man, he avoided its controversial aspects and did not presume to contradict the white man's statements.[22]

Thus, Negroes refrained from exercising their rights because social custom opposed it and because they were apt to meet with a painful rebuff if they deviated from established usages. The economic barrier was also a factor in fostering separatism. Most Negroes simply could not afford to pay the prices that were charged in white business and mercantile establishments. In the rare event that the Negro did frequent a white hotel or restaurant, the white patrons often responded either by completely withdrawing or by drastically reducing their attendance.[23]

Negro and white men generally had more association with each other than did Negro males and white women. Because social custom and work relationships allowed the males of both races more contacts, there was a friendlier relationship among them. Of course, there were set limits to these relationships beyond which the white man dared not trespass

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[22]Taylor, op. cit., p. 130.

[23]Woodward, op. cit., p. 28.

without being reprimanded by society. In their working relationships the white man was always the dominant figure and the Negro was careful to recognize this. As John Johnson, a Negro, put it, "A nigger can't make another nigger work," and "the trouble with the nigger is that a nigger is a coward. The nigger wants to be controlled."[24]

The majority of Negro families supported themselves as sharecroppers and day laborers. Many of the Negro women were occupied in the fields or in taking care of their families. Other Negro women, however, were employed as washer women, midwives and cooks, and, as such, had contact with the white women of the community. Such relationships were usually kept on an employer-employee basis because a white woman could easily lose caste by associating with a Negro woman. The employer often had a low regard for the quality of his Negro domestic and this is reflected in the poor wages he paid him. One northern family that took up housekeeping in North Carolina noted that:

> Wages are extremely low here for house servants. One reason for this is probably the fact that they are so worthless. All the well-trained family negroes, who had spent their lives in their master's houses, have gone off to the larger cities, to see something of the world, while those who remain are the rough farm laborers brought up in cabins off on the plantations, and are very ignorant

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[24]Hart, op. cit., p. 207.

> of the gentle manners and neat work familiar to the higher order of servants.[25]

This northern family was soon to find out that it was the custom for the Negro domestic to supplement his income by "toting." This practice (still facetiously referred to, as late as the 1940's, as "toting privileges") consisted of more or less open and unabashed appropriation of food and other necessities from the white man, usually with the knowledge and tacit approval of the employer. As the Yankee family put it, "We soon discovered that our cook's three little children fed in our kitchen, and, in spite of our remonstrance, we had to submit to this. . . ."[26] Indeed the practice of toting was so universal that in one instance a Negro folk song was devoted to this subject:

> I doan has to work so ha'd
> I's got a gal in a white man's ya'd;
> Every night 'bout half pas' eight
> I goes 'round to the white man's gate:
> She brings me butter and she brings me la'd
> I doan has to work so ha'd.[27]

Sometimes the Negro was not content with the accepted practices of toting and would covet a more valued item in the white man's household. In such cases, when he committed

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[25]A. L. Bassett, "Going to Housekeeping in North Carolina," Lippencott's, August, 1881, p. 206.

[26]Ibid.

[27]Ray Stannard Baker, Following the Color Line: An Account of Negro Citizenship in the American Democracy (New York: Doubleday, Page and Company, 1908), p. 61.

petty theft, his employer would try to recover the stolen item. In the event he succeeded, the servant was usually retained. If he was not successful in retrieving his property, the employer sometimes refrained from prosecuting the servant because he felt that he had nothing to gain by such action. Many whites believed that the Negro had a natural inclination towards theft and the more ignorant whites even regarded stealing as an inborn and ineradicable trait of the Afro-American.[28]

The white man had a similarly low opinion of Negro morality. His acceptance of and indifference to Negro immorality in fact contributed to misconduct in the black community. A typical example of white indifference is given by Hart:

> Even among the thriving and prosperous country and village negroes, the standards of conduct are unspeakable. Two neighbors, both northern ladies, in a very intelligent town, arrange for their two cooks to live in one little house: with those two black women live four illegitimate children. To dismiss the servants is not worthwhile, because there is every reason to expect that the successors would be of the same character. Among such creatures are brought up the children of white families.[29]

The "allowances" that the white man made for the Negro only served to undermine the latter's ethical

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[28]Jerome Dowd, The Negro in American Life (New York: The Century Co., 1926), pp. 117-139.

[29]Hart, op. cit., p. 208.

standards. The slovenly condition of many Negroes' homes and the forced intimacy made necessary by crowded conditions also exerted a corrupting influence. Both Negro and white men often took for granted the immorality of the Negro girl and pressed their lustful demands upon her. Some Negro girls found that they could most easily escape the poverty and deprivation suffered by most of their race by becoming the mistresses of white men. It is small wonder that in many instances Negro morality did not make rapid gains against such overwhelming odds.[30]

The North Carolina Constitution of 1875 reinforced earlier statutes when it declared (art. XIV, Sec 8, 1875): "All marriages between a white person and a Negro, or between a white person of Negro descent to the third generation, inclusive, are forever prohibited."[31] Even so, while there was strong opposition to interracial marriage, the attitude of the white population toward cohabitation was, contrary to contemporary opinion, remarkably permissive in the 1870's and 1880's. As Winston noted:

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[30]Baker, op. cit., pp. 169-170.

[31]McNeil Smith, et al., Equal Protection of the Laws in North Carolina (Washington, D.C.: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1962), p. 219. Frenise Logan states, however, on p. 183 of The Negro in North Carolina, 1876-1894 that "interestingly enough there was no law prohibiting interracial marriages" in North Carolina during this period.

> There was scarcely a community in the South but the young men and bachelors and widowers cohabited with colored girls. And . . . it was not considered a disgrace--it was a mere irregularity. The most aggressive advocate of white supremacy and of negro suppression might keep a mulatto woman, not to elevate her, not to degrade himself, not to break down the caste system, but to satisfy the engulfing sex urge.[32]

Some white men did not regard such conduct as adultery because they still held to the belief that the Negro was something less than a human being.[33] Another reason for the prevalence of cohabitation was the belief that the colored woman was sexually more responsive than the white, and did not feel ashamed of having illicit relationships. The white man also usually did not feel obligated toward the Negro woman in the event that she should bear his children, since the laws forbade his marriage to her in any case. Sex with the Negro had few complications or responsibilities. Finally, some of the biologists of the day encouraged the belief that the Negro was oversexed. It was widely believed that sexual relations with a Negro were for whites more exciting and stimulating than with members of their own race. A final justification that the white man gave for cohabitation, was

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[32]Winston, op. cit., pp. 139-140.

[33]Defenders of "the peculiar institution" sought to preserve slavery by picturing the Negro as a beast. They based their arguments on the physical differences between whites and blacks and on the Bible. In the latter case they relied upon a perverted interpretation of Genesis. For a detailed example see Buckner H. Payne, The Negro (Cleveland, Ohio: 1886).

the arrogant thesis that it was beneficial to the Negro race in that children born of such liaisons provided the black community with capable leaders. During these years, many whites believed that the natural leaders of the Negro race were the mulattoes, who were allegedly superior because of their "white blood."[34] In the 1890's, however, there was a change in the attitude toward cohabitation and a decrease in the number of these illicit relationships, probably because of the growing acceptance of the view that cohabitation was an act of adultery and because of the elaboration of a white-supremacy ideology.

Although it was a mere irregularity for a white man to cohabit with a Negro woman in the 1870's and 1880's, it was always regarded as a heinous and bestial act for a white woman to submit to sexual relations with a Negro male. In the event that a white woman sank to these depths, she became an untouchable. Forever after, she, as well as her children, were regarded as Negroes by the white community. Even the blacks looked down on her as an outcast, unfit for either black or white society. One of the original reasons for the condemnation of such racial promiscuity by the white community dates back to pre-Civil War times. Before emancipation, if a white woman cohabited with a Negro slave, any offspring born from this union were free. This happened

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[34]Winston, op. cit., pp. 139-145.

"because the mother, being a white person was, ipso facto, free in the South and the condition of her child followed that of herself."[35] In any case a white woman who cohabited with a Negro was considered a beast. She was almost invariably a member of the poor white class and was presumed not to be in full possession of her faculties.

The years from 1875 to 1896 formed a buffer between the countervailing periods of revolutionary Reconstruction and Reactionary White Supremacy. The dominant characteristic of the social relationships of the Redemption period was the emphasis upon social inequality. The stronghold of inequality during this period was the poor white population that was, in most cases, simply perpetuating the policies and practices of the past. It was not an era of reaction but rather of recuperation and readjustment. Conservatism rather than innovation predominated. While whites and blacks sustained many contacts, they were separated by an insuperable barrier. The relative calm of the era may be attributed to the majority acceptance by both the blacks and the whites of the status quo.

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[35]Green, op. cit., p. 190.

CHAPTER II

ECONOMIC RELATIONSHIPS

A. The Rural Negro

In North Carolina, emancipation wiped out a two-hundred-and-fifty-million-dollar investment in slavery and made necessary readjustment to a new economic order. Taking into consideration the social and economic revolution of Reconstruction and the presence of outsiders, the transformation progressed satisfactorily. This was in part due to the large number of farms in the state and to the relatively liberal treatment Carolinians had accorded their bondmen during slavery days.[36] The transition from the old economic order to the new involved the adoption of the tenant lease system.

Because agriculture still continued to be the pursuit of the majority of Carolinians, it was only natural that white landowners lacking labor and capital would adopt this system, and it was inevitable that the Negro, an experienced farm laborer who lacked land and capital, would follow the white man's lead. The tenant system fostered

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[36] Hugh Talmage Lefler and Albert Ray Newsome, North Carolina, The History of a Southern State (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1954), pp. 372-490.

the production of cotton and tobacco as the principal cash crops. This was particularly true of the eastern part of the state where the plantation system had been more predominant than elsewhere, and where the tenant system became more deeply entrenched.

The Redemption period witnessed a striking increase both in farm ownership and in tenancy. The number of tenants rose from fifty-three thousand in 1880 to ninety-three thousand in 1900, and the percentage of farms operated by tenants jumped from thirty-three to forty-one during the period. The ratio of share croppers to other tenants decreased from 5 to 1 in 1880 to 3.5 to 1 in 1900.[37] The fact that North Carolina progressed during this period is corroborated by the fact that it was one of the two southern states whose farm lands increased in value during the years from 1860 to 1890.[38]

Not all of the effects of the tenant system were salutary. While the number of farms did increase, their size and efficiency decreased. This in turn discouraged the use of machinery and the growth of cooperative enterprises and organizations. The tenant system not only retarded the development of progressive farming, but also impeded the growth of progressive attitudes. In order to

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[37] Ibid., p. 491.

[38] Hallie Farmer, "The Economic Background of Southern Populism," South Atlantic Quarterly, XXIX (Jan. 1930), 80.

understand the mentality of the rural population of North Carolina, one must first understand the elements of the tenant system.

Those who were employed as tenants in the South may be divided into three basic groups, depending on the extent of one's dependence on the employer. The most fortunate class of tenant were the renters who paid a fixed amount of rent for their land and who kept all the profits they made from it. Next came the share-tenants who supplied some of their rent and split the proceeds of their crop with the landlord. At the bottom of the social and economic scale was the sharecropper. He was totally dependent on his employer for his land and supplies and received a smaller portion of the profit from the crops than did the share tenant.

It has frequently been pointed out that tenancy was not a racial institution. In support of this contention, it has been emphasized that white tenants outnumbered Negro tenants at all times in North Carolina. The advocates of this point of view do admit that a higher percentage of Negro farmers were tenants than was true of the whites, but they also insist that the percentage of Negro tenancy was on the decrease while that of white tenancy was on the increase.[39] While all of these contentions are true, they do

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[39]Lefler and Newsome, loc. cit.

not negate the fact that most whites believed that the most suitable occupation for the Negro was that of the tenant farmer. They reasoned that the Negro was by nature and habit accustomed to agricultural labor. He functioned best as a tenant because, being simple and unsophisticated, he needed and appreciated the direction of the benevolent white landlord. One might make the conjecture that the reason the percentage of Negro laborers declined while that of white laborers increased is that with the passage of time Negroes learned more effective means of beating down the racial and economic barrier. Those blacks who surmounted this servitude may have been replaced by the more numerous whites, who may themselves have been displaced from better positions, because of the increase of black competition.

If tenancy was not a racial institution, it was still the primary occupation of the Negro during the Redemption period in North Carolina. Furthermore, it cannot be denied that the arrangement exacerbated and perpetuated poverty. Perhaps the safest conclusion one may reach is that tenancy was a biracial institution which, by its nature, pressed with unequal weight upon the poor. And, equally to the point, most Negroes fell into this classification.

The tenant lease system or crop lien system as it is often called first became prevalent after the Civil War because of the land owner's need for credit. His lack of capital made it necessary for him to pledge portions of future

crops in order to obtain the necessities that he had to have in order to farm and live. It was only natural that the tenant, who was in more desperate need, adopted the same bad policy of living on a lien against his future crops. This mortgage averaged about forty percent of the tenant's crop in the eastern counties of North Carolina, which were heavily populated by Negroes.[40]

It was also to be expected that the merchant would take a keen interest in the production of the crops against which he granted credit. Indeed, he often would not extend credit unless he was allowed to decide the type and quantity of the crop to be produced. He also took the responsibility for the sale of the crop. He usually favored the cultivation of cotton and tobacco because there was a large demand for these crops. Cotton and tobacco production was particularly prevalent in the eastern counties of North Carolina where the Negro tenant was most numerous. The agricultural conditions in these counties were more favorable to cotton and tobacco than to other products, and these crops had been produced there even before the advent of the crop lien system.

The merchant, not unnaturally, has usually been pictured by historians as a greedy and unscrupulous individual

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[40]Prenise A. Logan, The Negro in North Carolina: 1276-1894 (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1964), p. 78.

who took pitiless advantage of the farmer. As Clark put it, "he was a puppet master who made his community go through its peculiar economic dance."[41] But to a certain extent the merchant was also the victim of the system. His patrons seldom had enough money to operate on a cash basis and if he did not extend them credit he would soon become bankrupt. The farmer also must share some of the blame for the overemphasis upon cotton and tobacco production. Quite often the farmer would not or did not know how to produce other crops. In many cases he preferred to be completely dependent on the merchant for food stuffs rather than do the work involved in crop diversification and livestock. His dependence on cotton and tobacco caused soil depletion, making it necessary for him to increase his debt to the merchant by purchasing costly fertilizers. Indeed these shortcomings of the farmer were constantly harped upon in agricultural periodicals and newspapers during the Redemption period. One typical example in the Progressive Farmer noted that

> . . . hard times will hover around our firesides so long as we buy meat and bread, hay, fertilizer, and other farm supplies, and attempt to pay for them from the proceeds of one crop.[42]

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[41] Thomas D[ionysius] Clark, Pills Petticoats and Plows: The Southern Country Store (New York: Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1944) p. 53.

[42] As quoted in John D. Hicks, "The Farmers' Alliance in North Carolina," The North Carolina Historical Review, II (April 1925), 164.

Although the merchant may not deserve all of the odium for the lien system, it was no accident that innumerable country stores sprung up all over the South after emancipation. Nor was it by chance that the Negro rapidly became the store's best customer. The country store, after all, was the sole provider of innumerable "luxuries" that had been denied the slave. It was only natural that the freedman coveted these items and soon began buying what he wanted rather than what he needed. He paid dearly for this privilege in the form of inflated prices and usurious interest rates. Having little knowledge of mathematics or simple economics, he soon found himself deeply in debt. Thus through the lien system his creditors rapidly forced him back into servitude. The Negro reflected in song on the evils of this system to which he fell prey:

> An ought's an ought
> And a figger's a figger
> All for the white man
> And none for the nigger.[43]

In defense of the storekeeper it should be noted that the Negro was himself partially to blame for the inflated prices and high interest rates. Sometimes the black tenant, who had used up the bulk of his credit, would abandon his crops against which there was a lien, leaving his creditor with nothing but unfulfilled promises. Since

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[43] Clark, op. cit., p. 313.

the storekeeper could not afford to sustain such losses, he compensated by distributing them among his more faithful patrons in the form of high interest rates and inflated prices.

The crop lien system gave the landowner an effective means of control over his tenants. This was particularly true in instances which came to be fairly typical, where the landowner was also the operator of the country store. Even when the landowner did not control the country store, he usually had the cooperation of the store owner. By being able to control the tenant's credit, the landlord was also able to control the tenant's food supply. When the tenant displeased him in some way, the landlord could cut off his food supply until he mended his ways. This was true even in cases where the tenant had not overextended his credit.[44]

At the other extreme, some plantation owners allowed their tenants to use up their credit and extended them a lien against the next year's crop in order to tie them to the land. Another method used to keep the Negro from emigrating was to forbid him to sell his crops before harvest time. If the white landowner did allow him to sell

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[44]Edgar Tristram Thompson, "The Natural History of Agricultural Labor in the South," in American Studies in Honor of William K. Boyd, ed. by David K. Jackson (Durham, N.C.: Duke University, 1940), pp. 163-164.

his crops before then, he would not give him a fair price. The Negro would then be forced to remain on the land, because he would not have the minimum of funds that were necessary in order to migrate. The contractual agreement between tenant and landlord usually extended, however, for the duration of the crop.

Although the landowner had acquired certain controls over the tenant through the crop lien system, no other problem gave him as much concern as the handling of his labor. Most agricultural clubs throughout the period devoted a large part of their meetings to the question of the effective supervision and control of tenants.[45] One reason that Negro tenants were hard to control was that having recently been freed, they looked on labor as some sort of humiliation, and regarded white supervision of their work as an attempt to reinstate slavery. They also resented the fact that under the tenant system the extent of child labor was as great, if not greater, than under slavery.[46] At the beginning of the Redemption period, many Negroes still believed that the federal government would provide them with the fabled "forty acres and a mule," with the result that they adopted a wait-and-see attitude which had

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[45] Farmer, op. cit., pp. 78-79.

[46] Thompson, op. cit., p. 161.

a detrimental effect on their work. By the same token, some planters still hoped that they would be reimbursed for the losses they sustained during the war.[47] All in all, the farmer felt that the Negro tenant was too concerned about his privileges and not sufficiently concerned about his responsibilities.

Landowners often found it difficult to keep tenants on their land. Often the tenant would "hit the road" if he found that he was nearing the limits of the credit granted against his lien, or saw that a poor crop would rob him of the possibility of making a net profit. Getting only food and clothing for a year's work did not present a strong incentive to remain on the land. Some farmers tried to prevent this practice by refusing to hire a tenant unless he could prove that he had fulfilled his obligations to his most recent landlord. But the practice was not universal and some unscrupulous farmers even offered inducements to the tenant to get him to abandon his present landlord in order to secure his services.[48] It is not surprising, therefore, that plantation owners usually regarded the

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[47]C. W. Tebeau, "Some Aspects of Planter-Freedman Relations, 1865-1880," Journal of Negro History, XXI (April, 1936), 132.

[48]Oscar Zeichner, "The Legal Status of the Agricultural Laborer in the South," Political Science Quarterly, LV (Sept. 1940), 422-425.

Negro tenant as being irresponsible, and unlikely to fulfill his promises.

Most landlords in North Carolina preferred wage laborers over tenants. The prevailing belief was that the Negro worked harder when employed for wages.[49] One drawback of paying the Negro tenant in cash was that he spent it recklessly and in the end had to be clothed and fed by his employer after all. On the other hand, there was the danger that if the Negro was paid in credit, he would work at something else to get money, and thus divert some of his energies away from his employer's service.[50]

The Negro tenant was often apathetic toward the land he worked and was satisfied if he could eke out a bare living. He was superstitious and reluctant to try new agricultural methods. Planters also complained that he disappeared at critical times, especially when there was hard work to be done, and that he engaged in frequent social and religious festivities that drastically curtailed his productivity. Not infrequently he was careless with tools, and in general had little sense of responsibility. One reporter of the period observed:

> The complaint is general that even white men cannot control their hands, and that they are very irregular

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[49]Logan, op. cit., p. 76.

[50]Farmer, loc. cit.

> in their work: One gentleman makes it a practice, when he has a load of wood, to engage three or four to cut it. Possibly one may come when he agrees. Steady six days work is almost unknown. There is much intemperance and even among sober men no habit of saving.[51]

The general attitude that the farmers adopted toward the Negro tenant was that he must deal kindly and firmly with him as he would with a child, if he expected to get any work out of him.

While both black and white tenants were judged on their conduct and their ability to perform successfully, Negroes were generally preferred as tenants. This was partially due to habit and custom and also to the fact that the white man was more arrogant and uncontrollable. The typical Negro tenant was tractable and obliging while the white tenant was unruly and forever grumbling at his misfortune. Slavery had accustomed the Negro to manual labor while the poor white was more habituated to indolence. In the early part of the Redemption period, most of the Negro tenants were former slaves and thus often had ties with their landlord. They had the stigma of color attached to them and were more likely to recognize their inferiority. Yet, it was often the young Negro who was preferred as a laborer, because he had more ambition and energy.[52] A final reason

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[51] Hart, op. cit., pp. 207-208.

[52] Baker, op. cit., p. 73.

for the preference of black labor was that the Negro would work for less wages, whether they were paid in the form of cash or credit. The reason was not that he could live on less, but because occupational restrictions gave him no other alternatives.

A minority of North Carolinians had a strong distaste for the Negro and wanted him to emigrate from the state. They believed that by getting rid of him, racial tensions would be eased. They also thought that their taxes would then be able to provide their children with an adequate education, because they would no longer have to support a separate school system for blacks. As one prominent farm leader put it, he would "hail with delight and rejoicing his [the Negro's] peaceful departure and would pray God's blessing to attend him."[53] However, the majority of North Carolinians appreciated and preferred Negro labor in spite of its shortcomings. This sentiment was expressed by Cornelia Spenser:

> The negro makes a bad master,--an unreliable equal--but a good servant; and I hope the Southern masters and mistresses will recognize this great truth, and keep the race among us, and not be deluded into flooding the country with heathenish Chinese, or

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[53]As quoted in Stuart Noblin, Leonidas LaFayette Polk, Agrarian Crusader (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1949), p. 199.

> popish Irish, or impractical Poles or Germans, in place of him.[54]

The Negro laborer did not share the white man's point of view, and emigrated from the state in substantial numbers during the 1880's and 1890's. Of one such exodus, Josephus Daniels reported:

> In 1880 there was much excitement over the organized exodus of Negro laborers. A promoter of the exodus, "Peg Leg" Williams, who offered transportation and better pay to induce Negroes to leave North Carolina, was execrated. Large planters, dependent on Negro labor organized to put an end to the exodus. There were threats of violence to the agents. Legislation was enacted against it before it assumed serious proportions. . . .[55]

Fortunately for the plantation owner, many Negro leaders counselled against migration. They believed that the Negro had a better chance of improving his status by remaining in the South. As Frederick Douglass put it in a speech in Raleigh,

> A flea in a tar barrel, without claws, is far better off than a southern darky up North without money. The exodus the colored people want is that exodus from ignorance, vice, and lack of thrift.[56]

As in the case of Negro emigration, whites were divided in their attitudes toward Negro ownership of land.

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[54]Louis R. Wilson, ed., Selected Papers of Cornelia Phillips Spenser (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1953), p. 118.

[55]Josephus Daniels, Tar Heel Editor (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1939), p. 181.

[56]Ibid.

The poor white man, who was able to buy cheap land during Reconstruction and the early part of the Redemption period, resented any similar attempt at self betterment on the part of blacks. He pointed out that there would be the danger of an inadequate labor supply if Negro ownership was permitted. The sentiment of the poor white was expressed by an old Confederate soldier who said:

> we are having a hard time now keeping the nigger in his place, and if he were a landowner he'd think he was a bigger man than old Grant and there would be no living with him in the Black District.[57]

Perhaps out of respect for this hostile attitude, the Negro, at first, exercised caution in buying land. He avoided competing with white men at land auctions, and he would buy land only at the suggestion of a white man who wanted to help him. These acres were rarely of the best quality, but they were usually reasonably priced.[58]

The Negro landowner was an industrious and ambitious man, and he soon rose to positions of leadership in the black community. Moreover, it soon became evident that his example had a tendency to encourage industrious work habits among Negro laborers who wanted to emulate his example. As the Redemption period progressed, all effective opposition

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[57] Ibid., pp. 171-172.

[58] W. T. Couch, "The Negro in the South," in Culture in the South, ed. by W. T. Couch (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1934), p. 442.

to Negro ownership ceased. Indeed one black leader in North Carolina noted

> . . . if they [white people] see the colored man trying to better his condition, they are willing to assist him, and are not only willing to assist him, but do assist him.[59]

Thus the Negro was for the most part unfettered in his effort to buy land and was afforded the same protection that whites received in its purchase. Such progress in land ownership as he did make during the Redemption period, however, was limited by his low economic status.[60]

Agricultural labor in North Carolina was supplied by the tenant system. Though tenancy was not a racial institution, most Negroes were tenants and they were the greatest victims of the system. The beneficiary of the lien was the storekeeper and to a lesser extent the plantation owner. Although landowners constantly complained about the apathy and irresponsibility of the Negro tenant, they devised numerous obstacles to prevent his departure from their land. A small minority of blacks through industry and frugality, escaped the system and with approval of the white community purchased their own land, and became independent enterprisers.

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[59] M. L. Latta, The History of My Life and Work (Raleigh: Orgen Printing Company, 1903), p. 88.

[60] In contradiction to this view, A. B. Hart stated in 1893 that the Negro had bought "little or no land" in the last twenty years. Hart, loc. cit.

B. The Urban Negro

It can hardly be denied that the Negro suffered a great deal of abuse at the hands of white plantation owners under the tenant lease system. But at the same time the control over the black man that whites achieved by this arrangement promoted a more liberal outlook towards the Negro on the part of the white community. Racial enmity was further reduced by the diffusion of the Negro throughout the countryside.

In the city, however, there was no tenant system, and the Negro population was concentrated in a small area. Furthermore the ratio of blacks to whites was greater in the city than in the rural areas of the South. This was particularly the case in North Carolina where the Negro made up forty-eight percent of the total urban population in 1890. This percentage was greater than that of any other southern state at this time.[61] In the city Negroes were therefore more conspicuous, and race relations were more volatile. A brief review of the white attitudes toward Negro occupations and methods of control that were peculiar to the city will contribute a more complete

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[61]Frenise A. Logan, "The Economic Status of the Town Negro in Post-Reconstruction North Carolina," The North Carolina Historical Review, XXXV, No. 4 (Oct. 1958), p. 448.

understanding of the status of the Negro during the Redemption period in North Carolina.

The free Negro first migrated from the country to the city during slavery times because there his presence was resented less, and because he hoped to be afforded more economic opportunity. After emancipation, the city witnessed an influx of freedmen who came in hope of escaping bitter memories of slavery and of finding a better way of life. By the time the Reconstruction era was over, the role that the Negro was to play in the city was fairly well set. Negro occupations and opportunities were proscribed and limited by tradition and by the prejudices of the poor white class. The upper class accepted and adhered to these guidelines. There was, of course, a strong dislike for any Negro who did not conform to the accepted tradition.

Most of the blacks who lived in the city worked in domestic and personal service occupations. They were, for example, barbers, nurses, laundresses, restaurant keepers, and servants. One reason that Negroes often performed these jobs is that they had customarily performed them in days of slavery. In addition, the white community believed that the Negro recognized his own inferiority and was hence

more easy to manage than the poor white man.[62] Finally, the Negro would work for less money than his potential poor white competitor. Thus, it was socially and economically advisable to employ the Negro in these occupations.

In general, Negro wages were extremely low and often they were paid partially or entirely in the form of credit at the local store. In instances where he did receive cash wages, the Negro was often victimized by installment houses, which encouraged him to buy at high interest rates. A small minority of blacks attempted to establish their own businesses, a development that was rendered possible by the emerging patterns of segregation, which allowed the Negro to serve the needs of his own race. Nevertheless, these businesses were usually small and economically precarious. Many of them failed soon after they were established.[63] One reason for this was that slavery had prepared the Negro for labor rather than business. Most black enterprisers had little or no business training. What little commercial experience they possessed, had in most cases been acquired while in the employ of a white storekeeper as clerks or errand boys. Negro businesses also failed

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[62]Clarence A. Bacote, "Some Aspects of Negro Life in Georgia, 1880-1908," Journal of Negro History, XLIII (July,1958), 191.

[63]Ibid., p. 193.

because they were dependent upon the poorest segment of southern society for funds and customers. Negroes usually had little or no cash and when they were extended credit, they often found it difficult to meet their obligations to their creditors. Finally many black businesses were predestined to failure because they were founded on too little capital and operated on too marginal a basis.

Two industries that were predominantly Negro were the manufacturing of brick and processing of tobacco. The work in these industries was hard, monotonous, poorly paid and there was little opportunity for advancement. Many of these same conditions were to be found in the cotton mills but few Negroes were employed here. One explanation that has been suggested to explain this phenomenon centers around the fact that a large number of white women were employed in the cotton mills, and white employers were eager to prevent any contact between black men and white women, lest such association foster a decline in the Negro's abject deference to white womanhood. Another reason for the dearth of Negroes in this textile industry may have been the desire to keep them from competing with the large number of white employees.[64] In short, both social and

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[64]Logan, "The Economic Status of the Town Negro in Post-Reconstruction North Carolina," pp. 453-454.

economic considerations conspired to fence Negroes out of the textile mills of North Carolina.

In the few instances where Negroes worked in non-Negro jobs, they were paid less than their white counterparts, both to alleviate poor white resentment and because they were willing to work for less than many white workers would accept. Still there was no little bitterness on the part of poor whites when the Negroes were employed. The whites disliked any suggestion, however faint, of black equality, and complained that black competition kept white wages down.[65]

The condition of most city Negroes was little, if at all, better than that of rural Negroes. Methods used to control the city Negro appear to have been, in most instances, simply an extension and adaptation of the controls used on rural Negroes. As was true in the country, the tone of urban race relations was set, for the most part, by the poor white man. Blacks were confined to the most menial occupations. While there were avenues of escape they were so few and so elusive as to be nonexistent. The white man supplied the direction and the Negro the brawn. As one observer remarked: "without Negro labor the state would starve."[66] The validity of his judgment is all too often apparent.

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[65] Ibid.

[66] Hart, loc. cit.

CHAPTER III

THE COURTS

There can be little doubt that the average white man in North Carolina during the Redemption period believed that the Negro usually received fair and just treatment in the courts. One Southerner probably expressed the view of many when he said,

> Except where racial conflict arises, I conclude that a Negro of fair character, and with the respect of white neighbors, is likely to be given better treatment than if he were a white man.[67]

In point of fact, however, if a Negro committed a crime that created a tense racial situation, he often did not receive the judicious and fair consideration of the bench. If he murdered or raped a member of the white race, justice was apt to be meted out by a lynch mob rather than by a jury. In such cases, in fact, whites believed that the Negro was not entitled to the solicitous guarantees that white men could expect for themselves.

Lynching was especially prevalent in the South in the 1880's and 1890's. Some 43 Negroes were lynched in North Carolina for alleged rape or murder during the

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[67]Winston, op. cit., p. 214.

period 1881-1894.[68] Southerners apparently took the attitude that emancipation had unleashed a sex demon whose appetite could only be sated by rape, and that no white girl should be made to submit to the humiliation of facing her black attacker in open court. Not infrequently she would simply refuse to suffer such an affront to her racial pride. Besides, the courts were slow, unwieldy and uncertain. Lynching, it was argued, was the only recourse for such a crime. As one southern observer put it:

> The cure for lynching is the stopping of rape . . . The law should take its course. Provocation cannot set aside law with impunity, but the difficulty contended with is the determination of the Southern white man that women shall not be dragged to testify in such cases.[69]

Far different was the case of the Negro woman who was victimized by the white man's lust. Neither lynch law nor civil law took much interest in protecting her virtue, for most Southerners seriously doubted that there was any virtue to protect. That this inequality did not appear to excite the Negro greatly need not be surprising, when one encounters attitudes like those expressed by a prominent Negro who said, ". . . if a colored man attends to his

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[68] Logan, The Negro in North Carolina, 1876-1894, pp. 186-215.

[69] Stagg, op. cit., p. 22.

business in the South he never entertains any fear of lynching . . . None but bad people are lynched in the South."[70]

Fortunately lynch law was never as prevalent in North Carolina as it was in many other southern states. In North Carolina, it was restricted to those who were allegedly guilty of murder or rape. In other states of the South, men were hanged by mobs for such lesser crimes as horse stealing, and not a few were simply the victims of mistaken identity. The comparative moderation of Carolinians, so far as lynching was concerned, was in part due to the hostility of the majority of the state's newspapers toward the barbarous practice.[71]

Although whites believed that the Negro's rights were protected by the principle of noblesse oblige, the truth of the matter is that the Negro had nothing like the white man's chance in court. In most cases the court room was dominated by a white judge and jury. When blacks were seated on a jury, they were influenced and intimidated to follow the lead of the white jurors. Black juries were in fact prone to giving stiffer sentences to Negroes than to whites.[72] One problem the Negro defendant had was that his

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[70]Latta, op. cit., p. 174.

[71]Logan, The Negro in North Carolina, 1876-1894, p. 216.

[72]Tourgee, op. cit., pp. 392-393.

meager income often did not allow him to engage a lawyer. Thus, without counsel, and ignorant of the machinations of the judicial system, he was more apt to suffer conviction than his more prosperous white counterpart. Moreover, the fact that the Negro could be disenfranchised if he was convicted of a felony apparently contributed to more frequent convictions than might otherwise have been the case. In addition, if the Negro could not give security for costs, he could be sentenced to the penitentiary.

Some unscrupulous plantation owners took advantage of these injustices to rob their tenants. Sometimes immediately before the final division of the crop between landlord and tenant took place, the landlord charged the tenant with a felony, typically the theft and sale of a small portion of the crop the tenant was cultivating. Often the tenant was not aware that he was breaking the law by selling some of the fruits of his labor before the final division. But such was the law, and upon the conviction of the tenant, the landlord received the whole crop, on the grounds that the laborer was unable to complete his contract because of imprisonment. On the other hand, the landlord did sometimes lend the Negro tenant the money to pay his court costs. This was not always an unselfish act, for in some cases the lender would require the Negro's services in return for the payment of costs.[73]

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[73] Ibid.

In the event that the Negro was convicted, he was usually sentenced to the penitentiary, where he became a pawn of the convict lease system, by which the state leased out convicts to a contractor for a stipulated sum of money. The contractor was obligated to meet all expenses connected with the care and surveillance of prisoners. In some states, the penal system's concern for the convict thereupon ceased to exist, and the leaseholder could employ the convict in any way he saw fit, so long as he did not violate the law.

The North Carolina version of the convict-lease system had one redeeming feature. Under its rules, the labor of the convict rather than the convict himself was leased. The convicts and contractor were always under the supervision of the state's penal board of directors. The contractor received a fair day's work from the convicts supervised by state-employed guards.[74]

In the 1870's and 1880's most North Carolina convicts were leased out to railroads. The deprivations and physical hazards that Negro convicts suffered in such employment marks this period as the worst in the history of convict leasing. Many Negroes died while laboring on the railroads. In the 1890's, however, there was a sharp decline in railroad

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[74] Herbert Stacy McKay, "Convict Leasing in North Carolina, 1870-1934" (unpublished M.A. thesis, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1942), pp. 5-60.

construction and a corresponding decline in the evils of the convict lease system. After 1900 most convicts were employed in road and highway building.[75]

While the local courts often dealt with the Negro unjustly, the state supreme court was frequently the defender of Negro rights, probably out of fear of eventual federal intervention.[76] Time and again this tribunal defended Negro suffrage and education. However, in this capacity the court received a little incentive from the example of the federal Supreme Court. In the Slaughter House Case of 1873 and in United States versus Cruikshank, the United States Supreme Court drastically reduced the immunities and privileges of Negroes recognized as being under federal protection. The Civil Rights Cases of 1883 practically rendered impotent the restrictive parts of the Civil Rights Acts. In these cases the court concluded that the Fourteenth Amendment gave congress power to restrain states but not individuals from acts of segregation and discrimination.

In 1890 the court in the case of Louisville, New Orleans, and Texas Railroad versus Mississippi gave its blessing to segregation on trains. In 1896 segregation received another push in the separate-but-equal ruling in

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[75] Ibid.

[76] Logan, The Negro in North Carolina, 1876-1894, p. 71.

the case of Plessy versus Ferguson. The federal high court completed its capitulation to the South in 1898 when it sanctioned the Mississippi plan for depriving Negroes of the vote in the case of Williams versus Mississippi.[77] It is not hard to understand why the state Supreme Court climbed on the white supremacy bandwagon in the 1890's. Evidently the time had come when the South insisted upon its right to give its own interpretation to Lincoln's legacy.

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[77]Woodward, op. cit., pp. 70-71.

CHAPTER IV

EDUCATION

The movement for Negro education first became prominent during Reconstruction days. It was led by the federally created Freedman's Bureau, by northern churches, by philanthropists, and by the Negroes themselves. The Freedman's Bureau spent over $200,000 on Negro education in North Carolina from 1865 to 1869.[78] Philanthropists donated even more through such agencies as the Peabody Fund. But the greatest forward push was provided by Yankee missionary organizations and by Negro churches within the state. They provided facilities and educators to meet the needs of blacks in every part of the state. In addition the freedmen themselves gave generously of their labor and meager income for educational purposes. Adults and children of all ages flooded the makeshift classrooms, for the Negro hoped that by learning to read and write he would be able to free himself from a life of drudgery and inferiority.

It is clear that many southerners were opposed to the education of the Negro and convinced that the Negro

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[78]James A. Padgett, "From Slavery to Prominence in North Carolina," Journal of Negro History, XXII (Oct. 1937), 434-436.

was in fact uneducable. Some southerners were more especially hostile to the idea of Negro education because northern teachers planted what conservative southerners believed to be revolutionary ideas in their heads. The fostering of concepts of social equality by these Yankees was anathema to the social structure of the South. Southerners expressed their opposition by burning Negro schools and intimidating Yankee teachers. They excluded the northern teachers from their society and denied them room and board in their homes. Some teachers even suffered corporeal punishment at the hands of mobs or the Ku Klux Klan.[79]

Southern opposition to Negro education might have been greater if segregation had not been established in the schools at an early date. As early as 1868 the legislature of North Carolina authorized school segregation and in 1876 the Jim Crow requirement was written into the state constitution.[80] Segregated schools did much to alleviate anxieties about social equality. Poorly trained Negro teachers insured a low quality education, and without an adequate education the Negro could not endanger the white-dominated political structure of the state. In addition,

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[79]Tebeau, op. cit., p. 139.

[80]John Hope Franklin, "Jim Crow Goes to School: The Genesis of Legal Segregation in the South," in The Negro in the South Since 1865, ed. by Charles E. Wynes (University: University of Alabama, 1965), p. 145.

the school segregation policy of the South taught the lesson of white superiority to both black and white students at an early age, and the schools could be relied upon to provide an effective means of social control.

The poor white people of the South were, it should be added, extremely apathetic about the education of their own children during the Reconstruction and Redemption periods. The North Carolina superintendent of education commented on this tendency in 1884:

> The white people who are without the privileges of education and whose children are not educated, and who are keeping their children at home without education, have been so long without the privileges of education that they have reached a state of stupor which it is hard to get them out of.[81]

The Negro, on the other hand, was often more industrious and ambitious, and he coveted the advantages that he believed an education would bring him. Naturally the poor white regarded Negro education with suspicion, envy, and distrust. He believed that intellectual training was the prerogative of his more prosperous white cousin and that it should not be extended to the black. This is not to deny, however, that Southerners who were well above the poverty line believed that the Negro should have at least some education.

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[81] As quoted in Tourgee, An Appeal to Caesor, pp. 303-304.

Early in the Redemption period, popular opinion favored white teachers for such instruction of Negroes as the state might provide. Since there were few southern white teachers who could be induced to teach in Negro schools, the safer alternative seemed to be to entrust the education of the Negro to members of his race, rather than to seditious Yankee propagandists. One proponent of this view stated as early as 1870:

> I want to see our people at work in them, training the Negroes to do the work themselves and let the lines of promotion among their own color be freely opened to them. I long to see the day when intelligent, respectable, God-fearing Negro citizens are employed in the work of instructing their own people, and this prospect should be held out to them. And meanwhile our best citizens ought to lend a hand freely and generously, and let the Negro see that we wish him well, and give him a fair start. I am for retaining the colored race among us, and doing the best we can for them, for as we sow, so shall we reap in regard to them.[82]

Most whites, however, were of the opinion that a liberal dosage of education for the Negro would corrupt race relations. There was also the danger that the labor supply of the South would be greatly diminished if the Negro were allowed to progress in education and to raise their aspirations and expectations. Finally, some Carolinians were afraid that Negro teachers would prejudice their charges against the white race. Enoch Simmons expressed this opinion in 1898:

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[82]Wilson, op. cit., p. 239.

> The old slaves made good citizens. . . . The wisdom of their advice is no longer cherished by their descendants. A generation has come and another has gone since the beginning of these conditions, and instead of a realization of our cherished hopes disappointment is everywhere. Thirty-two years of generous education has for its reward in this race a growing dislike for the people that gave it. Education seems only to have educated well in teaching the recipients of this bounty, better ways of disliking, cheating, and defrauding its giver.[83]

It is hardly to be wondered at that elementary Negro education received much attention in North Carolina during the Reconstruction period when outside influences dominated the state. But it is surprising that there was no strong "backlash" when home rule was restored to the state. On the contrary, the interest in Negro education continued. A partial explanation for this is that Carolinians realized that they had to provide the Negro with an adequate educational system or allow him to continue to look to the North for assistance. Governor Vance expressed the need for native Carolinians to educate the Negro, in 1876:

> Their desire for education is an extremely credible one, and should be gratified as far as our means will permit. In short, I regard it as an unmistakable policy to imbue these black people with a hearty North Carolina feeling, and make them cease to look abroad for the aids to their progress and civilization, and the protection of their rights, as they have been taught to do; and teach them to

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[83]Enoch Spenser Simmons, A Solution to the Race Problem in the South (Raleigh: Edwards and Broughton, 1893), p. 17.

look to their state instead; to convince them that their welfare is indissolubly linked with ours.[84]

So with the Democratic party again in power, fears of black supremacy were allayed, and progress in Negro education continued. Laws were established to provide better schools for both races and northern agencies were permitted to continue to contribute their funds if not their philosophy.

Progress was unhappily shortlived, and by 1880 the desire to provide equal education for all began to decline.[85] This is understandable when it is recalled that Carolinians had long been tight-fisted in the matter of taxing themselves for education. Quite naturally when this penurious characteristic began to assert itself and educational expenditures were slashed, the Negro suffered most. Inequalities in the dual school system began to appear and they were to increase with the passage of time. In 1871, the per capita expenditure for teachers' salaries in the state was 41 cents for white children and a mere 26 cents for Negro children. By 1910 this disparity in expenditures had grown to $3.26 for whites and $1.39 for

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[84]Samuel A' Court Ashe, History of North Carolina, II (Raleigh: Edwards and Broughton Printing Company, 1925), p. 1181.

[85]Frenise A. Logan, "The Legal Status of Public School Education for Negroes in North Carolina, 1877-1894," North Carolina Historical Review, XXXII (July 1955), 347.

Negroes.[86] Thus, educational progress was impeded by hostility to Negro education and the parsimonious spending habits of the white population.

Southern hostility toward Negro education exhibited itself on the national level in 1883 in the "Blair Bill" issue in the federal Congress. This bill was designated to distribute government funds to the states in proportion to the amount of illiteracy. The South, of course, would have been the principal benefactor of such legislation. But since the measure stipulated that there should be an equitable distribution of funds between the races, southern congressmen rallied to defeat it.[87] In a word, prejudice of the southern white man was so deep rooted that he was willing to impede his own progress in order to keep the black man down.

One reason for the opposition to the equitable distribution of taxes was the circumstance that the Negro contributed only a small portion of tax money. The Southerner argued that the Negro should receive funds for his schools in proportion to the taxes he contributed. The implementation of this view was in fact attempted in several districts in North Carolina during the 1880's. In 1883, for instance,

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[86] Franklin, op. cit., pp. 146-148.

[87] Bacote, op. cit., pp. 207-208.

a bill was passed that authorized local assessments for school purposes. As a direct result of this law, the county commissioners of Gaston County taxed the property and polls of white people only for the support of white schools only. The Wilmington Daily Review defended this attempt to restrict the taxes of the white men to white schools:

> It will unify the whites in favor of a more liberal system of public schools for their race which they would cheerfully sustain; and, as the blacks are imitative creatures, they would be inclined to do their best in the same direction. Thrown upon their own resources and seeing that they will have to depend on themselves, all of them would pay their poll tax, whereas now, many thousands of them evade payment.[88]

Fortunately for the Negro, the state Supreme Court struck down the law of 1883, declaring that it violated the constitutional requirement that called for uniform and equal taxation on all property. The white population reacted by closing their graded school system. But after a short time, calmer councils prevailed and the schools were reopened, as the whites were convinced of the logic that it was better to support Negro schools than to deny their own children an education.[89]

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[88]As quoted in Logan, "The Legal Status of Public School Education for Negroes in North Carolina, 1877-1894," p. 348.

[89]Ibid., p. 356.

By 1883, then, elementary school education in North Carolina was anything but progressive. That the 3,847 school buildings in the state were totally inadequate, is strongly attested by the fact that their average value was only $95.32. Teachers were poorly equipped to give their students adequate instruction in the three-month school term that ninety-one counties of the state adopted. The efforts that teachers made were rewarded by low pay and poor working conditions. The average salary of white teachers was $24.11 per month while that of a Negro teacher was only $19.93. Under these conditions it is not surprising that in 1883 there still remained 58,000 illiterate white voters and 87,076 illiterate black voters.[90] Still, many of the inhabitants of the state appeared satisfied with the condition of the schools. Indeed one citizen testified in 1884 that: "the white people of North Carolina appreciate the advantages of education, and are doing all they can for the education of the colored race."[91] This was, of course, an exaggeration, for the record suggests, to the contrary, that Carolinians were apathetic to white education and opposed to the schooling of blacks. The white hostility toward Negro education is commented on by Albert Bushnell Hart:

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[90] Walls, op. cit., p. 229.

[91] J[ohn] B. Neathery, "Colored Schools of North Carolina," The North Carolina Teacher, I, No. 12 (May, 1884), p. 300.

> . . . education suggests to the North Carolinian organization, combined force, Negro supremacy, some vague kind of social equality. The Southern people are fond of talking of "two civilizations"' they seem to set the Negro out of their moral world, they feel no responsibility for his deflated state, and no impulse to help him raise himself out of it. His most demoralizing vices are accepted as unavoidable evils, like mosquitoes and ticks. The whites suffer from the low standard of Negro character more than the Negroes themselves, for they have more to lose.[92]

While the condition of lower education for Negroes continued to languish, there were some real gains made in the preparation of Negro instructors. Governor Vance, recognizing the need for a school to train colored teachers, said in 1875:

> A school . . . should be established for the education of colored teachers, the want of which is more deeply felt by the black race even than by the white. In addition to the fact that it is our plain duty to make no discrimination in the matter of public education, I cannot too strongly urge upon you the importance of the consideration that whatever of education we may be able to give the children of the state should be imparted under our own auspices, and with a thorough North Carolina spirit.[93]

Accordingly, the legislature of 1877 established, at Fayetteville, the first normal school in the state for the education of blacks. The lawmakers awarded an annual appropriation of $2,000 to the school, and then increased the sum in 1887 to $6,000. In addition, the school received

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[92]Hart, loc. cit.

[93]Ashe, op. cit., pp. 1180-1181.

financial assistance from the Peabody fund. The institution was small, having an initial enrollment of only twenty-five males and fifteen females. Curiously enough, the establishment of this school was opposed by some Negro Republicans who evidently feared that the Democrats would convert Negroes to their party through this act of generosity. There is little reason to believe, however, that the Democrats founded the school for political gain.[94]

By 1895 there were in the state seven normal schools specializing in the training of Negro teachers, with an enrollment of more than 1500 students. These schools were substandard by modern day criteria. None had permanent buildings at the outset. Usually, the students met in makeshift places that were donated by the Negro citizens of the area in which they happened to be located. Furthermore, the admission requirements were very low. Often a prospective student had only to know elementary reading, writing and arithmetic. Even so, it was a beginning.[95]

The first permanent state-supported institution for the higher education of Negroes in North Carolina was begun in 1891 as a result of the second Morrill Act, a

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[94]Rufus Early Clement, "A History of Negro Education in North Carolina, 1865-1928" (unpublished Ph. Dissertation, Northwestern University, 1930), pp. 108-109.

[95]Logan, The Negro in North Carolina, 1876-1894, pp. 145-146.

measure by which the federal Congress granted money to the states for educational purposes. The act stipulating that a portion of the money should be used for Negro education, led to the establishment of the North Carolina Agricultural and Technical College for the Colored Race at Greensboro. The state also contributed a portion of the money needed for the maintenance and operation of the school and the people of Greensboro contributed fourteen acres of land and $11,000. The school opened in 1893.[96]

North Carolina also saw substantial growth in private colleges for Negroes during this period. Bennett, Biddle, Shaw and Livingstone are among the better known of these. Livingstone College is particularly prominent, being the first Negro liberal arts college to be totally owned and operated by blacks.[97] The standards of these schools were usually not high. Ability to pay tuition was sometimes the prime prerequisite for admission. Bennett Seminary, for instance, offered:

> the elements of a good education to all the needy . . . of moral character, mental powers, suitable attainments and years, who will obey the rules and pay their bills promptly.[98]

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[96] Clement, op. cit., p. 121.

[97] Walls, op. cit., p. vi.

[98] Weathery, op. cit., p. 501.

These schools of higher learning were presumably tolerated by the white population of North Carolina. In response to a questionnaire sent out in 1895, these colleges denied that the white population was hostile to them. Biddle College concluded that it suffered "no opposition from the white race" and Shaw University replied,"It gives us pleasure to say the feeling for our work among the whites seems of the kindest nature and everything is helpful."[99] Although North Carolinians may have resigned themselves to higher education for the Negro, it is certain that they were not among its more prominent advocates. Indeed, many felt that it was a waste of time and money. One resident of Beaufort County testified in 1877:

> Money spent in educating the Negro does not pay . . . because of the inferior teachers. . . . I have lived here fourteen years, and I have never known a Negro teacher who could read intelligently or spell correctly half the common names in everyday use.[100]

Only one percent of the Negro population entered the professions in 1890, and most of these were accounted for in the teaching and ministerial fields. It is evident that segregation was a prime reason for the predominance of Negroes in these callings, for it gave the Negro a monopoly

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[99]Clement, op. cit., pp. 131-132.

[100]As quoted in Logan, The Negro in North Carolina, 1876-1894, p. 146.

in these two fields and protected him from white competition.[101] In a sense, therefore, the prejudice that kept the white teachers out of black schools benefited the Negro. Black students were spared instruction by poorly qualified and uninterested white teachers and at the same time the students had the incentive of preparing for at least two professions open to those of their race who displayed initiative. On the other hand, white prejudice and competition did effectively block most Negroes from entering the other learned callings.

Once the Negro entered teaching, he found that he had neither social nor economic equality with his white counterpart. He almost invariably received a lower salary than the white teacher, a disparity which whites justified on the grounds that Negro instructors were more poorly trained than white instructors, and that the Negro had a lower standard of living and hence could live on less.

No amount of educational achievement could give the Negro social equality and serious recognition among the white citizenry. One white man doubtless expressed the view of thousands when he said of an educated Negro, "Well, he's a nigger; and with me a nigger is a nigger, and nothing

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[101] Logan, "The Economic Status of the Town Negro in Post-Reconstruction North Carolina," pp. 458-459.

in the world can make him anything else but a nigger."[102] The southerner also was often of the opinion that no pure-blooded Negro could attain greatness. Only those who had an Anglo-Saxon inheritance could become successful. This viewpoint is expressed by Alfred Moore Waddell in his account of an encounter with Booker T. Washington:

> Upon the exchange of salutations, I expressed great surprise, saying that I had expected to meet a Negro, but that he was a much fairer-colored man than Frederick Douglass, and in fact was about three-fifths white, which explained to me his history and corroborated the historical evidence that no pure-blooded Negro had ever attained greatness, although Toussaint L' Ouverture, of [Hayti], came near it; whereupon he said that Toussaint was a mulatto according to his recollection--which of course, as I remarked, strengthened the evidence.[103]

Finally, when a dark-skinned Negro did attain prominence, the more superstitious white citizen expressed the opinion that this was a violation of the Negro's natural limitations for which he would have to account. When the brilliant educator, Joseph Price died at an early age, one commentator said:

> Of course he died before reaching middle life. No Negro can master a college course and devote himself to study without shortening his life. Price was a wonder, but he paid the cost by his early death.[104]

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[102] Helen M. Chesnutt, Charles Waddell Chesnutt (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1952), p. 28.

[103] Alfred Moore Waddell, Some Memories of My Life (Raleigh: Edwards and Broughton Printing Company, 1908), p. 245.

[104] Daniels, op. cit., pp. 306-307.

The Negro made gains in education during the Redemption period but the progress was painstakingly slow. By 1900, forty-eight percent of the Negro population above ten years of age remained illiterate.[105] The white man blamed the slow pace of the Negro advance on the black man's inherent ineptitude. Said one contemporary:

> There is a small class of cultivated Negroes, a sprinkling of black professional men, and a very few who have a little money; but the greater part of the race moves in a nether world of great ignorance and degradation. No one who has not seen them can appreciate the slowness of their advance.[106]

Part of the blame for the halting progress must be attributed to white opposition and prejudice. Hostility to the race's advance was especially conspicuous among the most degraded elements of white society, for the poor white man would not willingly replace the Negro as the South's scapegoat. As Tourgee wrote:

> Knowledge alone can kill prejudice. Education is the only reliable guarantee of peace and good order. Instruction is the best defense of the humbler citizens of a community. It is far cheaper for the government to provide education than to go on without it.[107]

By obstructing Negro self-betterment and nursing their prejudices the white people of North Carolina restricted their own advance.

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[105] Padgett, op. cit., p. 439.

[106] Hart, loc. cit.

[107] Tourgee, op. cit., p. 411.

The church as well as the school provided educational, social and economic opportunity for blacks. Negro churches often provided the direction, facilities, funds and intellect that was necessary for the education of their members. Church education was comprised not only of spiritual guidance but also of secular education courses. Church functions, clubs and committees also afforded the Negro a place in which he could develop the qualities of self-assurance and leadership through social intercourse. Finally the clergy was one of the few professions that was open to the black man.

While Southerners warmly approved the teaching of Negroes in Christian precepts, they often viewed the Negro church with suspicion and distrust. They suspected the Negro church of being a disseminator of Republicanism, Yankee propaganda, superstition, and unconventional social beliefs. One white citizen observed that the Negroes' views:

> . . . of what they owe Christ are so much blended with what they owe Mr. Lincoln and the Republican Party, that the mixture is a curious one in their minds and savors more of heathenism than even of superstition.[108]

Yet the white man himself was not averse to twisting scripture to support his claim of white supremacy.

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[108]Wilson, op. cit., p. 569.

Complaints that Negro religion was filled with superstition were not always unfounded. While some churches were directed by educated Negro clergymen, more were under the influence of woefully untrained men. Superstition and mumbo-jumbo was especially common in the camp meetings which were prevalent in the rural community. A description of one of these meetings is given by William E. B. Dubois:

> A sort of suppressed terror hung in the air, and seemed to seize us, a demonic possession and that lent terrible reality to songs and words. The black and massive form of the preacher swayed and quivered as the words crowded to his lips and flew at us in singular eloquence. The people moaned and fluttered, and then the gaunt-cheeked brown woman beside me suddenly leaped straight into the air and shrieked like a lost soul, while round about came wail and groan and outcry such as I have never before conceived.[109]

These religious gatherings occurred frequently and were a constant source of complaint to the white farmer, for when a camp meeting was on, all work on the part of the Negro laborer came to a standstill.

On the whole, Negro churches had a benevolent influence on the black man. In every case, they provided him with a meeting place where he could mingle freely and easily with friends. It is, in fact, not too much to say that the church and the school were the two

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[109]W.E.B. DuBois, The Souls of Black Folk (Chicago: A. C. McClurg and Co., 1903), p. 190.

principal institutions that contributed to the social, economic, and intellectual improvement of the Negro race during the Redemption period.

CHAPTER V

POLITICAL RELATIONSHIPS

The Civil War left the state of North Carolina in a condition of desolate poverty. The process of recuperation was of necessity a slow and delicate one, and Carolinians resented the medication being administered by carpetbaggers, scalawags and former slaves. Natives of the state regarded with disdain the clumsy attempts of the poorly prepared Negro to participate in the governmental process. As one Negro educator of the period observed:

> The white people of the South, smarting from the sting of defeat, stood sullenly aloof and gave the Negro neither advice nor assistance--were indeed rather gratified at seeing him sink deeper and deeper into the slough of incompetency and misrule, for successful government by the Negro would have been a shock to all their preconceived notions about the Negro which would have been infinitely harder to bear than even the worst misgovernment.[110]

Both prejudice and common sense made the white man resent the sudden and total enfranchisement of the unprepared Negro. Nor did the white man appreciate the logic of disenfranchising his own leaders. His indignation was further aroused when he noted that only five states in the

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[110]Chesnutt, op. cit., p. 51.

North allowed the Negro to vote at a time when universal manhood suffrage was introduced in North Carolina.[111] It was of these resentments that the Ku Klux Klan was born.

A secret society originating during the Reconstruction period, the Klan devoted its efforts to returning the control of government to the white natives of the state. Many poor whites, however, were motivated to join the Klan more for economic than for political reasons, for they saw in it the means of eliminating the Negro as a competitor in the day-to-day business of earning a living.[112] While respectable whites supplied the Klan with funds and leadership, it was usually the poor whites who performed its terrorist activities. The group was most active in the Piedmont section of the state where blacks were in a minority rather than in the East where the Negroes were most numerous.[113] The reason for this may be that in the Piedmont, the white population had a better chance to dominate the polls through intimidation than in the East. In the black counties of the East, the whites were too greatly outnumbered to make intimidation worthwhile.

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[111]Smith, et al., op. cit., p. 7.

[112]William M. Brewer, "Poor Whites and Negroes in the South Since the Civil War," Journal of Negro History, XV (Jan. 1930), 30-31.

[113]Smith, et al., op. cit., p. 8.

The Klan lost much of its strength in North Carolina soon after the restoration of home rule. In 1868, the general assembly passed legislation outlawing all secret political and military organizations.[114] Many of the society's more respectable members withdrew their funds and support from the Klan believing that the organization had outlived its usefulness, since the carpetbaggers and scalawags against whom much of the Klan activity was directed, had been ousted from power. Although hostility against politically inclined Negroes persisted, most whites recognized that these blacks had been the dupes of unscrupulous whites who had manipulated them for their own political ends.[115] Moreover, hostility against the Negro in North Carolina was softened by the realization that the black man had never had a majority in the state legislature during Reconstruction.[116] The white man was willing to let the Negro retain the franchise as long as it did not endanger native white control of the government. With the white native again firmly in possession of the state government, there

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[114] Ibid.

[115] Chesnutt says, however, the greatest mistake southerners make is "in ascribing the corruption of carpet-bag rule to the Negroes. That it was mostly due to the rapacity of the corrupt and unscrupulous white men seems to be overlooked." Chesnutt, loc. cit.

[116] Logan, The Negro in North Carolina, 1876-1894, p. 9.

was little need for the politically motivated activities of the Klan.

The year 1876 marks the restoration of home rule in North Carolina, although the state did not again become solidly Democratic until 1879. The long period of Democratic control that followed the recovery of home rule is sometimes referred to as the era of "Bourbon Democracy." The term implied that the Democrats, like the restored Bourbon monarchs, had learned nothing and forgotten nothing by the fall of their old regime and were dedicated to restoring as much of it as possible.[117] Democratic ascendany naturally implied the elimination of the Negro as an important political factor in politics. Rather than systematic oppression of the Negro, the Democrats preferred a paternalistic system of control over him. Tourgee described the attitude of the southern white Democrat in 1884.

> He simply regards the Negro as an inferior, with an inherited belief which amounts almost to an instinct, even if it be not actually instinctive. He wishes only good to that inferior; he has no desire to do him harm, to lessen his comfort or prevent his success, within what he deems the proper sphere of his existence. He is a Christian man, and he desires to see the colored man improve in morals, industry, and the virtues of a Christian life. All these things he may most earnestly and sincerely desire in the colored man whom he calls "our brother in black." It is only when the

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[117] R. D. W. Connor, North Carolina: Rebuilding an Ancient Commonwealth, 1584-1925, II (Chicago: The American Historical Society, 1929), pp. 399-400.

> necessity arises for considering this race as the equal of the white race in power, in freedom, and in opportunity, that we discover that beneath this sentiment of kindness lies the indefinable feeling that the colored man may not, must not, shall not, stand upon the same level of right and power as the white. It matters not how charitable the man may be in an overwhelming majority of cases, you will find that he has, at bottom, an ineradicable hostility to the colored man as a political integer, simply because he "is a negro."[118]

When the conservative Democratic party was restored to power, it made no initial attempts to disfranchise the Negro. The revised state constitution of 1875 contained no restrictions on Negro voting rights. One reason for this moderation was that the white population outnumbered the Negroes two to one, so that there was no need to take the vote away from blacks in order to assure white rule. There was, moreover, the fear that Negroes might have united with white sympathizers to defeat the entire constitution if it had deprived them of their voting rights. Finally there was the danger of federal intervention if the franchise was taken away from the black man, since the recently enacted Fifteenth Amendment not only forbade states to deprive any person of the right to vote "on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude," but also explicitly clothed Congress with "power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation." But while the Negro

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[118] Tourgee, op. cit., pp. 96-97.

race legally retained the franchise, there were early attempts to restrict and control his vote by indirect means.[119]

The desire to minimize the importance of the Negro vote was particularly great in the eastern counties of the state where the population was predominantly Negro. Accordingly, the Democratic-controlled legislature of 1876 inaugurated a new system of county government that insured white rule. An act of that year took the corporate powers away from the townships and made the county the unit of local government. It also provided that the legislature would be responsible for the selection of the Justices of the Peace.[120] Since Negroes were denied the right to elect their own magistrates, they were dependent on Democratic appointees for the protection of their personal and civil liberties. Thus they had no effective means of protesting white oppression at the ballot box. As long as the Conservatives controlled the legislature, they could assure white rule both in the black eastern counties and in the Republican counties of the West.

The voting power of the Negro was further restricted by two items in the amendments of 1876. One provision

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[119]Clement, op. cit., p. 98.

[120]Connor, op. cit., pp. 405-406.

increased the county residence requirement from thirty to ninety days. Since Negroes during these years often migrated from farm to farm, they were penalized by this residence requirement. The other stipulation that discriminated against the Negro was the provision that any person found guilty of a felony should be disfranchised, for the white-dominated judicial system assured an inordinate number of Negro convictions.[121]

In spite of all the impediments, the Negro did make some headway in politics during the Redemption period. Four black men were elected to the United States House of Representatives between 1876-1894, while 15 Negroes were elected to the state Senate and 52 to the lower house of the General Assembly during the same period.[122] In addition, Negroes filled many other positions throughout the state. The overwhelming majority of these Negro officeholders were elected from the black counties, for most white men resented Negro officeholders and would not vote for them. The memories of Reconstruction were still vivid. Senator Vance, of North Carolina, voiced this resentment in a speech in the United States Senate in 1890:

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[121]John Blount McLeod, "The Development of North Carolina Election Laws, 1865-1894" (unpublished M. A. thesis, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1947), p. 79.

[122]Clement, op. cit., p. 129.

> Since their admission to citizenship they have been elected to both branches of congress and have occupied almost every position under state authority. They have controlled entire states, counties, and municipalities, and in every instance their rule was marked by failure and ruin. It was a war against property, intelligence, and respectability. The few years of their misrule in the South will be remembered in our history for their corruption and retrogression, and will constitute a damnable blot on the memory of those who authorized it, and who looked on with complacency so long as the thieves were Republicans and the victims were Democrats.[123]

White impatience with black officeholders is further testified to in a letter to Senator Matt Ransom in 1887:

> I have been thinking I would write you in regard to the Negro Mail Agent from Goldsboro to Greensboro. He passes here every day and the people of Johnston think it an outrage that he is in office more than two years after a Democratic Administration is in power. I tell you it will hurt us in the next campaign if he is not removed. I feel and know we will have hard work to carry Johnston in the next election at best and it will be a heavy load to carry a Negro Mail Agent and win the race. I do wish for the sake of the Democratic party that the Negro mail Agent could be removed.[124]

The white community resented the appointment of Negro postal agents for economic reasons as well as for racial reasons. While the Democrats did make Negro appointments, most of these were restricted to positions involving only

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[123] Z. B. Vance, The Negro Question. Speech delivered in the U. S. Senate on January 30, 1890 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1890), p. 6.

[124] Letter, A. M. Noble to Matt W. Ransom, May 16, 1887, University of North Carolina, Southern Historical Collection, Matt W. Ransom Papers.

menial labor. The Republican party, on the other hand, awarded Negro positions of a more desirable nature.[125]

While the Democrats were opposed to Negro possession of political power, they were not opposed to soliciting and buying the black man's vote to further their own political fortunes. But the Democrats relied on racially inspired white support more than on Negro votes to win elections. As one Republican said in a political speech in 1884:

> Nigger, nigger, is its [Democrats] only cry. The nigger is the Democratic stalking horse. Down in Hell--and Hell's where the Democrats belong--you can tell a Democrat everytime. There he sits holding some skinny-headed Negro between him and the fire.[126]

The Democrat justified the disparagement of the Negro and of Negro voting on the basis of the alleged unfitness of the blacks to exercise the franchise at all. He also argued that the denial of the franchise to the Negro was no worse than the Northern employer's habit of telling his workers how to vote. Finally he argued that while the North criticized the South for its abuse of the Negro, it was only in the Southern states that Negroes were permitted to exert any significant influence. Indeed, one

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[125] Logan, The Negro in North Carolina, 1876-1894, p. 7.

[126] Winston, op. cit., p. 157.

Negro native of North Carolina expressed satisfaction with the treatment his vote received:

> While North Carolina does not profess perfection in this matter, it is far in advance of many of her sister states in the South. There is freedom of speech and political freedom there--I vote as freely there as I would in New York. Of course all of us have to keep our eyes open for a fair count. But I suppose some of the states, not Southern, may have a little difficulty now and then in this respect.[127]

By granting the Negro emancipation, the Republican party had won the affection and vote of the black man, and early recognizing the importance of the Negro as a political factor, it made a practice of wooing his vote. One Republican method of appealing for Negro ballots was cited by J. A. Buxton in a letter to William J. Peele:

> . . . One of the best ways to reach the negro is to appeal to his pride. Tell him many think him nothing but a brute and that they can easily buy his vote for $1.25, but the eyes of the world are upon them to see how they will act in this great moral question, etc.[128]

Aside from its black supporters, the Republican party was made up principally of whites who were former Whigs and opponents of secession. White Republicans in fact constituted a minority group and, for the most part, were ostracized by members of their race.

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[127]Walls, op. cit., p. 388.

[128]Letter, J. A. Buxton to William J. Peele, June 24, 1881, University of North Carolina, Southern Historical Collection, William J. Peele Papers.

The rural farm population was predominantly anti-Negro in sentiment and hence staunchly supported the Democratic party during Reconstruction and in the early Redemption years. Soon after the carpetbaggers were ousted and white rule was assured, however, the smaller farmers began to find fault with the Democratic party. They gathered in organizations called Granges to discuss their problems and the indifference of the Democratic party to their plight. The Grange was first introduced in 1873 in North Carolina and by 1875 had reached its peak membership of 10,000 members.[129] Thereafter it rapidly declined because of its inability to meet the farmers' needs.

The farmer's concern over his problems continued and in the 1880's he organized a number of farm groups in an attempt to solve them. The most successful of them was the Farmer's Alliance, established in North Carolina in 1877 as a "strictly white man's, nonpolitical, secret, business association."[130]

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[129]Simeon Alexander Delap, "The Populist Party in North Carolina," Historical Papers of The Trinity College Historical Society, XV (1930), 41.

[130]John D. Hicks, "The Farmers' Alliance in North Carolina," The North Carolina Historical Review, II (Apr. 1925), 170. Because of the segregation policy, the Negroes formed a Colored Alliance in 1887. By 1890 they had a membership of 55,000. Although this organization was nonpolitical, the Democrats were fearful lest they unite with the White Alliance in the election of 1894 to unseat the Conservatives. Apparently, these fears were unfounded. Logan, The Negro in North Carolina, 1876-1894, p. 84.

The Alliance movement had several advantages over the Grangers. While both were primarily social organizations concerned with economic improvement, the Alliance was more aware of the importance of the political arena as a means of solving the farmers' problems. The Alliance also had the able leadership of Leonidas LaFayette Polk. Polk, an established leader in the state, was the first State Commissioner of Agriculture (in 1877 and in 1886), and the founder and editor of The Progressive Farmer.[131] He was able to organize the farmer and to give state-wide attention to his grievances through this agricultural journal.

The Alliance rapidly assimilated the other farm groups in the state and affiliated itself with the national Populist Party. By 1891 it had amassed more than 90,000 members in North Carolina.[132] After that year its membership dwindled quickly because of internal divisions over the Negro question. Those who remained in the Populist Party after 1892 were Populists first and Alliancemen only incidentally.

The Alliance early became involved in state politics in spite of its claim that it was a non-political

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[131] Ibid., p. 169.

[132] Lefler and Newsome, op. cit., p. 497.

organization. In 1888 the state legislature was flooded with newly elected farmers, and an alliance leader was made speaker of the House of Representatives. By 1890 about half of the Republicans and most of the Democrats had committed themselves to the Alliance program. The emergence of the Populist party and the wholesale defection of Democratic voters gave the Democratic leaders a sharp scare. In the election of 1892, the Democrats played on the people's fears of black supremacy. Their success was incomplete, but about half of the Alliancemen were swayed and went back into the Democratic party, while the other half remained in the Populist party. The political battle of 1892 was followed by the panic of 1893, and this in turn converted a large number of poor whites to the Populist party.[133] There were, then, by 1894, three parties in the state, and in this situation the Negro had the balance of power.

In the election of 1896, the Populists compromised their principles and united with the Republicans in an attempt to defeat the Democrats. The fusion of the two parties arose out of political necessity and did not reflect a common outlook on political issues. The Populists refused to endorse Negro candidates and the Negroes regarded the

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[133]Hicks, op. cit., pp. 182-183.

Populists with distrust. The attitude of the Populists toward fusion is expressed in a letter to the Populist leader, Senator Marion King:

> Senator, it cannot be truthfully asserted or proven that you have either encouraged or assented to Negro domination. By force of necessity our party had been compelled to use the Negro in order to elect such men to office as would enact our principles into law and honestly administer the state government.[134]

Although the fusion was unstable and unnatural, it was successful. For the first time in twenty years the Democrats lost control of the state government, and in 1896 they were defeated again by this same coalition.

The Negro received his share of the spoils as a result of the Fusionist victories, for more than a thousand Negro office holders were appointed after the triumph of 1896.[135] The county system of government that had been devised by the Democrats to control the black counties now worked in favor of the Negro and nearly three hundred black magistrates were commissioned by 1898.[136] Having had a taste of power the Negro was hungry for more. In a

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[134]Letter, Joseph M. King to Marion Butler, October 25, 1898, University of North Carolina, Southern Historical Collection, Marion Butler Papers.

[135]W. A. Mabry, "Negro Suffrage and Fusion Rule in North Carolina, North Carolina Historical Review, XII (April, 1935), 91.

[136]Padgett, op. cit., pp. 484-485.

black convention held in Raleigh in 1897, he declared that he would in the future vote for no man who would not pledge before election that one half of his clerical force would be Negro.[137] Race relations became strained, as whites criticized the incompetence and insolence of Negro office holders and blacks countered with charges of prejudice and intolerance. The disenchanted poor whites now beat a hasty retreat back into the Democratic party. Passions flared, and the times were ripe for the white supremacy campaigns that were to follow.

The election contest of 1898 was a sordid racist campaign. Wild rumors were circulated to the effect that the Negro was planning to take over the state. A Raleigh newspaper claimed to have uncovered one such plot:

> It is no secret that colored leaders, ambitious for their race, have matured in their minds a plan by which they hope to obtain absolute control of the legislative, judicial, and executive, and then to rapidly carry out a scheme of colonization by which this will become a thoroughly Negro sovereign state with that population in the majority and furnishing all officials in the public service from senators and governors down to the last constable and janitor. If their plan succeeds, North Carolina is to be the refuge of their people in America. Their brethren from all the southern states will be invited to come here, cast their lot among their fellows, and together work out their destiny in whatsoever degree

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[137] Connor, op. cit., p. 456.

> of prosperity and advancement they may be able to achieve for themselves.[138]

In addition to rumors and recriminations, racial hatred was abetted by the rise of white supremacy clubs and an organization known as the "Redshirts," groups reminiscent of the Ku Klux Klan in their composition, aims and methods. Even the Populists were pressed by public opinion into taking an anti-Negro stand. The party organ declared:

> It is a fact so well known to make it superfluous to repeat it, that wherever the caucasian race dwells it rules. It is the work of supererogation to declare that it will always rule this state. The cry of "negro supremacy" and negro domination is as absurd as a discussion of racial amalgamation. No person or organization can more fully appreciate and understand this statement than the editor of the Democratic papers and the Democratic party itself. At no time in history has the Democratic party feared or apprehended what they are now pretending to cry against.[139]

The Populists' attempt to placate the white voters was ineffectual and in 1898 the Democrats won a decisive victory.

National policy also contributed to the increase of white supremacy. The year of 1898 saw a resurgence of the

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[138] As quoted in Rupert B. Vance, "Aycock of North Carolina," Southwest Review, XVIII (April, 1933), 291.

[139] As quoted in Helen G. Edmonds, The Negro and Fusion Politics in North Carolina, 1894-1901 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1951), p. 143.

spirit of "manifest destiny," during which the United States engaged in imperialistic adventures under the leadership of the Republican party, and subjugated more than eight million people of the colored races who inhabited islands in the Pacific and the Caribbean. Thus, out of necessity, the federal government became more tolerant of racist viewpoints, moving one southern commentator to remark:

> It would be embarrassing to the Chief Executive and to the Federal Government to have the Constitution of the United States guaranteeing certain rights to, and keeping certain privileges from, those of her citizens dwelling in the isles of the sea and yet under the American flag, and at the same time having in her very bosom all rights guaranteed to, and no privileges excluded from, the race, in many particulars, more vicious and as incompetent for the exercise of the franchise as the brown and yellow-skins of the Hawaiian group.[140]

Northern sympathy for the southern viewpoint was also increased by the growth of northern investment in the South. Business investments created new bonds of friendship and a new awareness of southern problems. The new union of white men abridged the Negroes' rights in the same way that the older division between whites had expanded the black man's rights.

The culmination of the rise of white supremacy was the effectual disenfranchisement of the Negro. In 1899, the Democrats introduced a constitutional amendment that

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[140]Stagg, op. cit., p. 29.

for all practical purposes deprived the Negro of the vote. The amendment prescribed a poll tax and the ability to read and write any section of the constitution, as requirements for voting eligibility. Poor whites, meanwhile, were excluded from these requirements by "grandfather clauses" which decreed that no male could be deprived of the right to vote if he or his ancestors had had the franchise before January 1, 1867.[141] The legislature then proceeded to pass Jim Crow legislation that greatly increased the degree of legally prescribed segregation. (Much of the legislation that was passed, however, had already been enacted in the northern states.) Thus, after 1900 the Negro became a ward of the state and was dependent upon white paternalism for the protection of his rights.

To sum up, with the restoration of Democratic government in North Carolina in 1876, racial tensions had been eased, and the Negro was allowed to retain the franchise and to make some political gains. But the more the Negro progressed, the more he felt the disabilities that remained. The white majority tolerated the Negroes' meager gains so long as they did not jeopardize the Democratic stranglehold upon the state's government. The Negroes grew impatient for equal representation and in 1894 they united with

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[141] Padgett, op. cit., p. 486.

disgruntled whites in an attempt to break the Democratic monopoly over the state. The fusion victory led to the temporary advance of the Negro cause, but soon a reaction set in. Victory, all too soon, turned into devastating defeat. The white man felt his fancied superiority threatened and took the steps that he believed were necessary to "put the Negro in his place." The political progress of the Negro came to a standstill, not to be significantly resumed for another seventy years.

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